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City cautiously celebrates BRAC

Party honors those who worked to keep Redstone safe

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It was like a victory party being run under a caution flag.

All of the business leaders at the hurray-we've-made-it-this-far soiree Thursday at the Chamber of Commerce knew that nothing was final. Almost 1,800 federal jobs aren't yet on the way here. There are still a few phases to go in this round of Base Realignment and Closure. For as good as it looks right now, it could all amount to nothing, or even less than nothing.

Still, a sense of victory was undeniable at the not-quite-yet festivity. There was wine, cheers, applause and a "congratulations" banner at the party aimed at celebrating the efforts of community leaders who have worked since the last round of BRAC 10 years ago to get Redstone ready to attract new commands here.

All of the local folks involved in the data-gathering, idea-generating and packet-stuffing were honored for their efforts and told to get ready for even more work if President Bush and Congress sign off on the BRAC commission's recommendation to relocate several important military commands and headquarters here from the Washington, D.C., area.

The word "if" was used, but the word "when" was heavy on their minds.

"This is just a celebration, not a victory party," said Dave Hargrove, incoming president of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce.

"We're congratulating everyone on their efforts."
Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee co-chair Joe Ritch was received like a conquering hero at the party when he came in, just returning from his ringside seat at the BRAC hearings in Crystal City, Va., just outside D.C.

Ritch told the group that he was getting nervous as he watched the BRAC votes leading up to the

The panel also approved two recommendations that would move work from Redstone - a munitions and ordnance school and a robotics office.

Under the panel recommendations, Redstone would lose the Army Munitions, Ordnance and Electronics School, with about 900 Army students and 95 military instructors and other workers. The school was established in 1953 to show soldiers how to use the missiles being developed at the arsenal.

All the recommendations will have to be approved by President Bush and the full Congress.

"Today is a good day for Redstone and all of North Alabama," said U.S. Rep. Bud Cramer, D-Huntsville.

"I welcome these significant additions to our community and look forward to working with them during their transition. While I am excited about today's actions, we must continue to remain watchful as the BRAC Commission decides on the remaining recommendations for Redstone."

U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa, also gave the plan his stamp of approval.

"I am pleased that Redstone Arsenal will be the new home to the Army Materiel Command headquarters. Moving AMC's headquarters to Redstone Arsenal will result in cost savings and co-location with similar missions," Shelby said in a prepared statement.

"I look forward to welcoming (AMC commander Gen. Benjamin Griffin) and the command headquarters to Huntsville."